

A photograph of a city sidewalk with flower planters and pedestrians. In the background, a woman with long blonde hair in a white shirt and blue jeans walks away from the camera. Next to her, a man in a colorful patterned shirt and blue jeans walks in the same direction. The sidewalk is lined with large, round planters filled with a variety of colorful flowers, including red, orange, pink, and purple blossoms. The background shows a city street with trees and buildings under a clear sky.

# Akron City

May-August 2004

## Akron's in Bloom!

### You Can Help it Grow!

See page 16

**Haircut Traditions, Reflections on Progress and an A+ Partnership**



# From City Hall... This City Reads!

**T**he photograph accompanying this article is remarkable — first, because I even allowed it to be taken. For 16 years (as my staff knows well), I have had a “no hats” policy. Ever since a governor from Massachusetts was photographed wearing an army tank commander’s helmet, I have chosen NOT to wear funny hats — at any time, for any reason.

So I surprised myself in late February when I accepted the invitation of Kathy Crawford, a librarian at Reimer School, to put on hat and gloves on the 100th birthday of Dr. Seuss and to read *The Cat in the Hat* to some 200 children, grades K-5.

I guess two things have changed since 1988 (the year of the Mike Dukakis photograph) that moved me to change my “no hats” policy: first, becoming a grandfather; and, second, understanding the great need we have to do almost anything to make kids read.

If you have children, do you read to them? Regularly?

If so, your children are likely to become readers, to enjoy reading and to be successful in school.

In homes where young children are not read to, they never seem to find the joy of

books, don’t read as well and are not as successful.

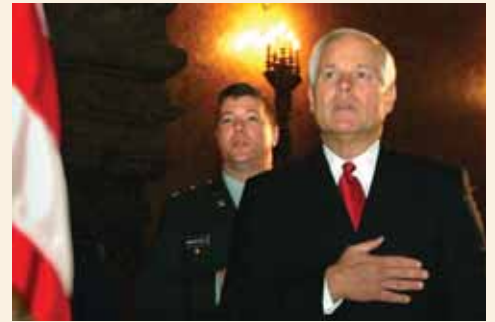
We are all more aware of the need to read because of an extraordinary event that was sponsored by the City of Akron with Project:LEARN, the Akron-Summit County Public Library and the Akron Beacon Journal.

On January 14, “This City Reads!” sponsored a 30-minute reading session. During that half-hour, more than 50,000 people in Akron and surrounding communities stopped whatever they were doing to read, and set a new record in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

Will that event change proficiency test scores? Of course not.

Will our awareness of the need to read accompanied by more books in more homes, more tutors for more children, make a difference in those test scores? You bet.

“This City Reads!” was a good start. But more participation by more adults is needed. Call Project:LEARN at 330-434-9461 for more information, or go to the website of THIS CITY READS! at [www.thiscityreads.org](http://www.thiscityreads.org). And my personal thanks to Childrens Hospital President Bill Considine and Pastor Ron Fowler of the Arlington Church of God for their leadership in this effort.



The second photograph on this page is meaningful for different reasons. It was taken on Dec. 30, 2003, in the lobby of the Akron Civic Theatre as we pledged allegiance to the flag as part of the ceremonies that led to my taking the oath of office as mayor for the fifth time.

Pastors Bob Denton of the Victim Assistance Program and Luther Cooper of Mt. Zion Church in Akron joined me as Judge Annalisa Stubbs Williams administered the oath.

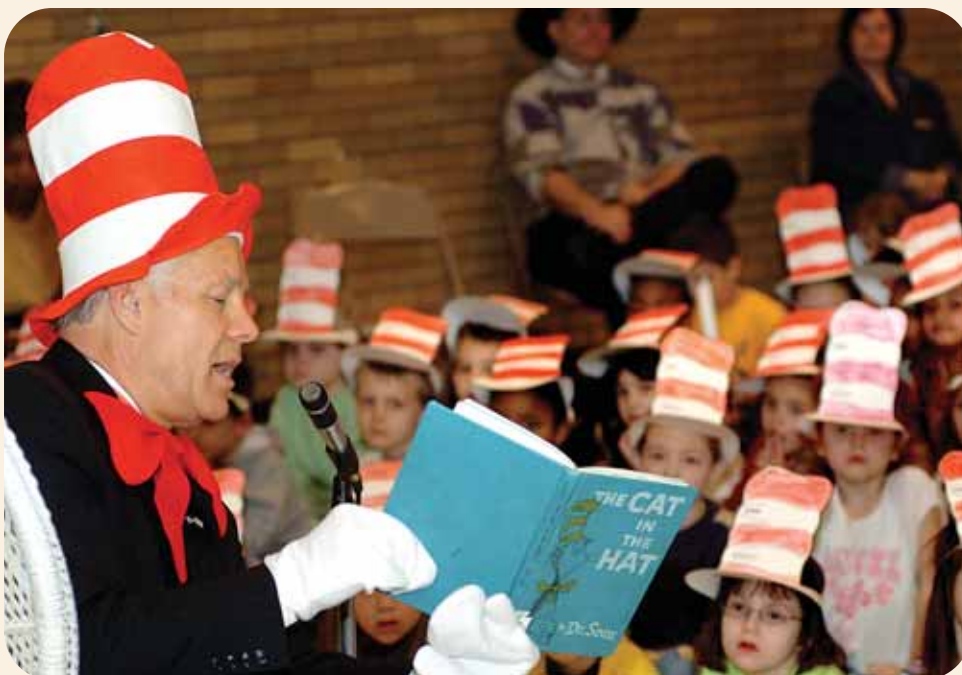
Leading us in the pledge was Capt. Eric Mansfield of the U.S. Army Reserves. All of us have come to know him as the anchorman of Akron’s own TV-23 evening news, but almost a year ago, he was deployed to fight with other volunteers in Iraq.

I was pleased that Eric’s wife, Lisa, received a standing ovation from the several hundred people present that afternoon, for it is she — and every other military wife and family — who are the true heroes of the current war.

We’ve not been able to identify a precise number of Akron men and women who have left the city to serve in Iraq, Afghanistan and other points overseas; but we’d like to know about them, and honor each of them and their families.

We’ve set up a telephone line just for that purpose — 330-375-2025. Leave a message for our Mayor’s Office of Military Assistance, and we’ll try to publish as many names of Akron men and women serving in the military in future issues of this magazine.

It’s the least we can do.



*Donald L. Phangyullie*

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## Our Cover Photo...

...is **Bruce Ford's** telephoto view of the University Avenue bridge between the University campus and Broadway, along the entrance to the National Inventors Hall of Fame. The Flowerscape program is operated by Keep Akron Beautiful with generous support from individuals and companies in the community. It was one reason why Akron won the "America in Bloom" competition in 2003.

**Tell us what you think** by replying to [editor@ci.akron.oh.us](mailto:editor@ci.akron.oh.us)  
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## Neighborhoods

### Hickory Street



## New Urbanism, Historic Canal-Era Charm Coexist

By Robert Sberna

**D**eveloped around the old Ohio & Erie Canal in the mid-1800s, the Hickory Street neighborhood has a rich history as well as a unique setting. Though located within walking distance of Akron's central business district, Hickory Street has retained its canal-era small-town charm.

"What's most striking about the area is that it's almost a rural-like setting within a half-mile of downtown," says Jerry Egan, comprehensive planning administrator for Akron's Department of Planning and Urban Development.

Hickory Street itself is about two miles of meandering road that crosses over two sets of railroad tracks and extends from near Elizabeth Park to Memorial Parkway. For decades, Hickory Street was somewhat of a hidden enclave for its mostly long-term residents, some of whom have old canal locks in their back yards.

In recent years, the nearby Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail and the Cascade Locks Park have made the Hickory Street neighborhood an increasingly popular destination for recreation enthusiasts and history buffs. The Park, a part of the Cascade Locks Historic District, is the site of the restored Frederic Mustill House & Store, which served as a general store for canal users from the 1820s until the end of the 19th century. The Towpath Trail, which will one day stretch from Lake Erie to New Philadelphia, brings thousands of hikers and

bikers to Hickory Street each year.

With the area's easy access to downtown and its surrounding natural beauty, city officials and local developers are optimistic that that many of Hickory Street's visitors can be converted into residents. In 2002, Akron City Council approved plans for the Hickory Development, a planned community of 70 new single-family homes on 10 acres of city-owned land at the junction of Hickory Street and Memorial Parkway.

For other portions of Hickory Street, the city plans to implement an urban renewal campaign that will consist of home rehabilitation assistance, new housing and streetscape improvements that will include resurfacing and new curbing, sidewalks, lighting and trees.

The Hickory Development will incorporate "new urbanism" elements such as a centralized public square, a mixture of housing types and alley-loaded garages. Noting that construction should begin soon, Egan says the Hickory Development will be attractive to a wide range of home seekers, especially downtown workers.

"For people who want to be close to work and enjoy the rural character of the area, it's a great location," he adds.

Bridget Garvin, executive director of the Cascade Locks Park Association, says neighborhood redevelopment efforts such as the Hickory Street project can have wide-ranging benefits for Greater Akron.

"The new housing will bring people back to Hickory Street, which is important to the vitality of Akron's central business district," she explains. "Not only will the project be good for the city, but it will also help to limit the movement to the suburbs."

Garvin's organization, which was formed 15 years ago, provided development and planning assistance for the Hickory Street project. "The city valued our input," she says. "Our intent was to spark revitalization in this area. I think the redevelopment could be a great thing for the neighborhood, if it's done right."

Ward 5 Councilman Jim Shealey, who represents the downtown area and the majority of the Hickory Street area, says the Hickory Development satisfies a growing need for market-rate housing near the central business district.

"One of the things we're striving to do is provide housing for people who want to stay downtown,"

Shealey says. "With this new project, we'll be developing a downtown neighborhood around the downtown area. My motto is 'Money brings money.' Anything we can do to bring money into the area will attract more investment, which will help get rid of some of our blight and enhance the entire ward." ■



Ward 5 Councilman Jim Shealey

In 2002, Akron City Council approved plans for the Hickory Development, a planned community of 70 new single-family homes on 10 acres of city-owned land at the junction of Hickory Street and Memorial Parkway.

### Firestone Park



Henry McGrady is a scissor-wizard in his shop.

## Westside Barber Shop is a Cut Above the Ordinary Business

By Billy Soule

**M**oviegoers have been moved to laughter and tears by rapper Ice Cube and comedian Cedric the Entertainer in the Hollywood hit *Barbershop* and its sequel.

But the film — set in Chicago — has nothing on Akron's own Westside Barber Shop — at 567 Vernon Odom Blvd. Located in a storefront in Akron's traditional African-American neighborhood, it is a place filled with history as well as laughs.

Henry McGrady has been cutting hair at the Westside Barber Shop for 29 years. Three years ago, he became just the third owner in the shop's 50-year history.

On any day, customers may be treated to Black History lessons by some of the regulars, including a barbershop preacher neatly attired in a reddish suit with brown shirt and a two-tone handkerchief to match. He never runs out of stories about how the record of slavery has shaped his life. The barbershop soapbox also works for politics, gossip and news of the day.

McGrady works one of the shop's three chairs. The other two are in the capable hands of Jane McCloud (who learned her trade from her father who cut hair for neighborhood boys without the benefit of a license) and Steve McCall, who joined the team three years ago.

From time to time, former barbershop owner Al Knight may stop by to give advice on hair styles or life, as he did on a recent day when I heard him counsel a 24-year-old customer, the father of a 5-year-old, on child-rearing and responsibility.

A painting of *The Last Supper* hangs over the chairs, but with a twist: Historic Black American faces are substituted for the disciples. And a new hero — the pride of Akron — also holds a place of honor between Henry and Steve. There hangs a plaque honoring Akron basketball sensation LeBron James.

"This is the best haircut around," says Charles, a customer who drives to Akron every few weeks from Orville. Haircuts are not the only offering: customers can also register to vote.

Despite the ever changing cheers and jeers that mark the repartee between barbers and customers, there are some constants. As I was leaving the shop, I could hear Henry mutter, "Oh no, I hope he doesn't pick me," as a crying 2-year-old was being brought into the shop for his first real haircut.

This child was about to be introduced to something more than a lifetime of edge-ups and shaves. He was being "baptized" in one of Akron's more enduring traditions. ■



Steve and Marcy Baker

## Ido Bar & Grill is Still a Landmark

The streetscape outside the Ido Bar & Grill has undergone a significant change in the past year. But inside the Firestone Park landmark, Steve Baker is still serving the home-style meals that have made the Ido a neighborhood tradition.


In existence since the 1930s, the Ido was purchased by Baker and his wife, Marcy, in 1998. While maintaining its casual atmosphere, the couple has redecorated the restaurant and expanded the menu at 1537 S. Main Street.

"We try to include fresh ingredients in everything we cook," says Baker, a Firestone Park resident who was chef at a Waterloo Road restaurant for 18 years before purchasing the Ido. Baker's homemade soups include chicken tortilla, stuffed pepper and chicken paprikash.

The Ido's diverse clientele includes neighborhood residents and workers from downtown offices and nearby manufacturing firms. "We have a lot of regulars who come here for our specials," Baker says.

In a typical week, the Ido will feature steak on Monday, a pork chop special on Tuesdays, half-off burgers on Wednesday and Swiss steak on Thursdays. Friday means fish. And Baker's Saturday specials may include prime rib, halibut, lobster tail and scampi.

Baker says the city's renovation of South Main Street has inspired him to invest in capital improvements to the Ido. His plans include paving the parking lot and upgrading the building's exterior. He recently installed new carpeting and purchased new chairs.

"We have customers who have been coming here for years," he says. "It's nice when customers walk into a restaurant and know the people who work there." 



## Ride to the Top

When Patricia Ashbrook left Buchtel High School in 1958, a new B.F. Goodrich tire cost \$16, and

rock-and-roll fans paid \$2.50 to attend a Roy Orbison and Carl Perkins concert at the old Akron Armory.

When Ashbrook began her career as a receptionist in the Akron's Purchasing Department, the "modern" office of the day was largely a "hands-on" operation. Prior to 1960, office equipment typically consisted of manual typewriters and hand-cranked duplicating machines.

"By the end of the day, I had ink all over me," Ashbrook says.

Not only were women not accustomed to traveling alone outside the city, they even had company riding between the floors of City Hall. "Back then," she says, "there were operators working the elevators."

That said, Ashbrook nonetheless remembers "walking into the Municipal Building for the first time and thinking that it was the most beautiful building I had ever been in."

During Ashbrook's 46-year career, she has served as a clerk/typist, purchasing aide and buyer. Currently, she is purchasing agent—head of the department. "Over the years, my goal has been to learn as much as I can about my job and the purchasing system," Ashbrook explains. "I've tried to keep up with the advances in technology."

That includes the ever-present computer. "When it came time to computerize, it was a little scary," she admits, "but now I love them." A participant in the evolution of modern office technology, Ashbrook says she has no plans of retiring. "I'll stay as long as they'll have me," she says. "The city has been like a second family to me." ■



# 30-30 Hindsight

## Veteran City Employees Still Love Their Work

In 1974, the city of Akron launched a long-term planning venture called Goals for Greater Akron. The project tried to envision what Akron would be like in the future, and prepare the city for change. (See History, page 12)

How much and how dramatically has Akron changed since 1974? In this issue of *Akron CITY Magazine*, four senior employees look back, with "30-30 hindsight," to reflect on how the city they love has kept pace with the new century and new urban challenges.

**By Robert Sberna**

### Pioneering Hero

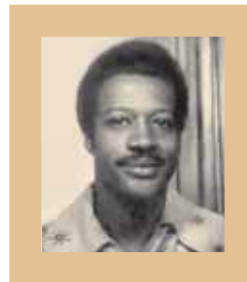
During his 30-year rise from rookie firefighter to Chief of the Akron Fire Department, Charles Gladman has accomplished many firsts.

"In 1973, I was one of a group of seven African-Americans who integrated the Fire Department," says Gladman. "Because we represented a change, we faced some challenges in those days. But the challenges were part of the job and that made it more rewarding."

Gladman was promoted to lieutenant in 1979 and captain in 1986, becoming the first African-American to hold those ranks in the department. In 1997, he was appointed chief of the 390-person department, which now includes nearly 80 African-Americans.

The substantive social progress in the department has been accompanied by a growing number of challenges for firefighters. Gladman says the department's responsibilities and equipment have evolved substantially over the past three decades.

"One of the biggest changes is that we now have an emergency medical service," he notes. "When I started my career, we didn't run ambulances; we mainly just responded to fires. In 1978, we added our emergency-medical-service units. With the EMS units, we have additional responsibilities



and training. Now, we have hospitals, doctors and emergency personnel all scrutinizing what we do."

Gladman adds that technological advancements have made firefighting a safer occupation. "It's still a dangerous job, but the equipment is far superior to what we had when I was a rookie," he says. As examples, he says today's fire gear is fully encapsulated and breathing apparatus is much lighter.

Recalling the early days of his career, Gladman says he never imagined that he would someday head the department.

"This has been a great career choice for me," he says. "It has given me the opportunity to help people." ■

## Breaking tradition

Even the City Hall coffee break has changed in 30 years. For the better.

"When I first started, it wasn't uncommon for a male employee to ask a female to get him a cup of coffee, even if the woman was an accountant," says Community Events Coordinator Yvette Davidson. "Back then, most female employees were secretaries or planning aides. Now, there are many more women in management positions."

Management may be an understatement in Davidson's case: She oversees more than 350 events per year.

"Anytime a group wants to hold a concert, festival, charity run, or any other function on city property, I get involved," says Davidson, who joined the city in 1967.

Davidson spent the first 20 years of her career in the Planning Department; first as a planning aide, then as an accountant.



"Eventually, I became bored with accounting and started looking for a position in which I could use my marketing skills and also work with the community," she explains. "But at that time, the city was more focused on the basic tasks of government. There was

much less public relations and interaction with community groups."

In the early 1980s, Davidson persuaded the city administration to create the position of community events coordinator for her.

"We started from scratch, with only a desk and a box on the floor," she recalls. "As it turns out, we created a monster. We've gone from coordinating 13 events that first year to more than 350 events now."

Community groups love holding events in Akron, because it's an easy city to work in."

While Davidson says she "never thought she'd be at the city for 37 years," she says that "there have been a lot of good changes

here over the years. There is no job today in the city that a female isn't allowed to hold, whether it's being on a garbage truck or working out in the field as an engineer. Nowadays, there are lots of opportunities for us to expand and grow." ■



## Longtime Lawman

Over the years, Michael Madden has taken on a new law-enforcement partner—the citizenry itself.

Madden began his career with the Akron Police Department in 1971, shortly after the height of the anti-war and civil-rights demonstrations that swept the nation.

At that time, recalls Madden, police officers in Akron and many other large cities were hired and trained according to a "professional model" that emphasized centralization and less personal interaction with the community.

"Because of the civil unrest of that time, the country changed its view of police work and how it was done," he explains. "The emphasis was on making cops impervious to corruption. It was thought that prejudice and bigotry could be wiped out by centralizing the police."

However, by distancing its officers from the community it serves, the police department was perceived as a monolithic structure, notes Madden, who serves as deputy chief in charge of the Investigative Sub-Division.

"Nowadays, we are trying to partner with the community," he says. "We want to

involve the citizens in setting our priorities and developing our strategic plans. If the community works with us, then the long-term benefit will be that we can concentrate our attention on residents' concerns and issues."

A former U.S. Marine and a Vietnam veteran, Madden can

look on a career that has included service as Narcotics Coordinator and Commander of the Special Weapons and Tactics Unit (SWAT). Over the past three decades, he says technology and the proliferation of crack cocaine have had perhaps the most impact on the focus of police work.

"With the onset of crack cocaine, drug trafficking has been brought into people's front yards," he says. "Crack has brought forward a lot more turf battles. In certain neighborhoods, citizens feel besieged by drug dealers. We've had to significantly increase

the number of our narcotics officers."

In addition to involving citizens more in crime prevention, advances in computer technology and forensic science, such as DNA testing, have made police work more efficient. Madden notes that the police department recently installed an AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System) terminal, which enables officers to quickly compare fingerprints with those on file with various local and national law enforcement authorities. ■





# This is A

Nine mayors from the nation of Brazil in South America lunched at Greystone Hall with members of the City of Akron's cabinet and administration, to ask questions about safety and security, water supplies, and public finance. Akron hosts hundreds of public officials from around the world each year as part of the city's relationship with the U.S. State Department.



Akron's **Aeros** re-opened the baseball season at Canal Park in April. The Cleveland Indian's double-A team played an aggressive schedule

On January 14, the city and county rallied to achieve a common goal—to have the most people reading for 30 minutes in one day anywhere. Akron and Summit County had 51,541 people report reading activities of 30 minutes or more.



The Congress of Cities, meeting in Nashville, Tenn., in December, heard from Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic, who received the award as "Municipal Leader of the Year," from *American City & County* magazine. More than 2,000 mayors and city council representatives gave Akron's mayor a standing ovation.

[www.ci.akron.oh.us](http://www.ci.akron.oh.us)

Akron City

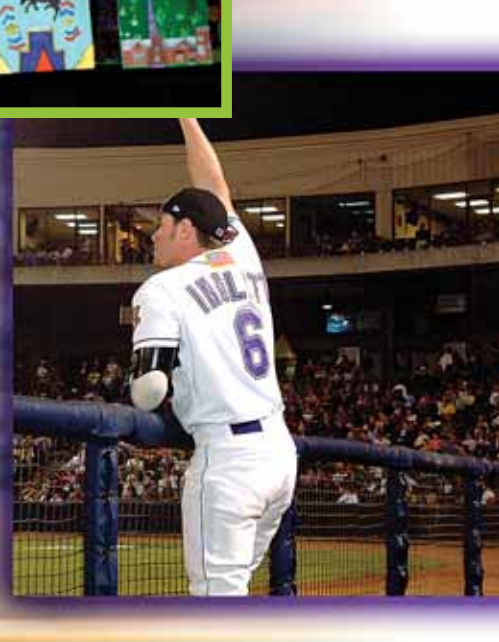
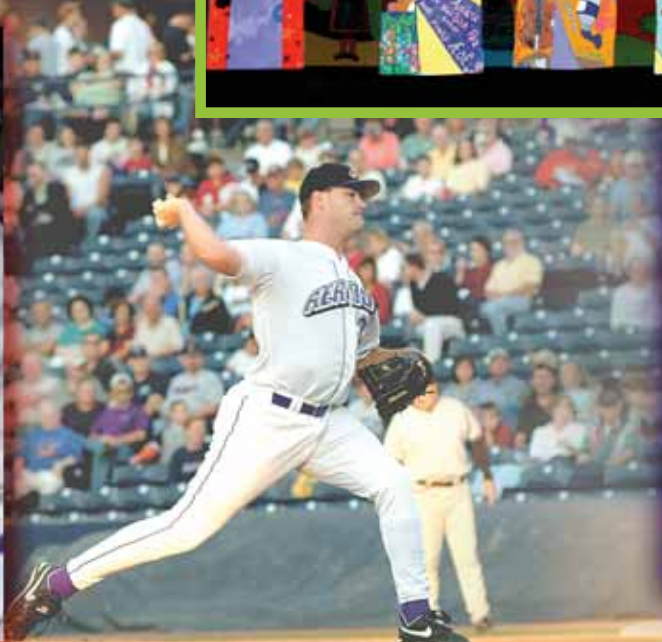


# AKRON

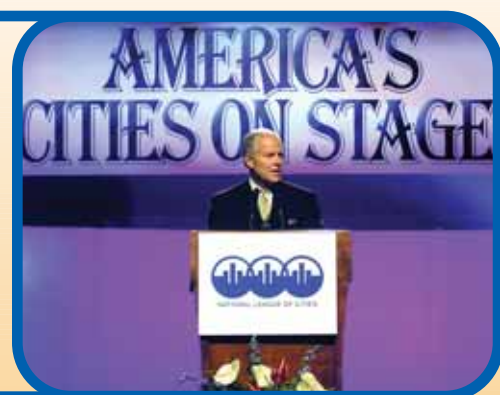
Photos by Bruce Ford



Akron high school sophomore and juniors are competing for spots in the 2004 Lock 3 Summer Arts Experience. Last summer, 60 students learned from professional artist-mentors and created art displayed at Lock 3, including a textile hanging (below) spelling out Akron with painted scenes of the city, while others created a mural design of teenagers from around the world (left).



to become the Eastern League Champions in 2003. This season, most Friday homegames will feature fireworks.



A dozen fragments of the **Dead Sea Scrolls** along with other rare manuscripts told the story of the modern Bible in an exhibition at the John S. Knight Center in March. Tens of thousands of Akronites and visitors saw the writings that were 2,000 years old (left) and curator Lee Biondi (right) opened an original Gutenberg Bible for Center employees (left to right) Joan Timm, Dirk Breiding, and Mary Tricaso.





# An A+ Partnership

## City, Schools Launch Learning Centers

By Laraine Duncan

The ambitious 15-year plan to renovate or rebuild every Akron Public School structure and to make each building into a Community Learning Center (CLC) is underway.

During regular school hours, CLCs will serve as the best, most modern school facilities Akron can build for its students and teachers. After hours, and on weekends and during summer breaks, the centers will provide residents new opportunities for adult education, recreation and other community activities.

Planning for the \$800 million construction project represents a unique partnership between the city of Akron and the Board of Education. Outside consultants have told officials that Akron is the ONLY city in the United States in which every school building is being transformed into a CLC.

Because community input has been critical in the planning process, a series of meetings with school and city officials began last December. Also present for the meetings has been the Akron Architectural Group—the team of local designers picked to draw plans for construction—as well as teachers and members of each neighborhood.

These initial meetings have focused on putting together what architects call the Program of Requirements, which will lay the groundwork for designing buildings in the first segment of construction: Findley and Schumacher academies, Fairlawn, David Hill, Voris and Mason Elementary schools and Jennings Middle School.

Neighbors have also been invited to begin planning the new Helen Arnold Community Learning Center, an exciting new partnership among the city, the schools and the Akron Urban League. The facility will be located near the innerbelt at Vernon Odom Boulevard, in the new Lane Field area.

To make decisions about the CLCs, the city and the school board have signed a



Planning the Community Learning Centers has been a community process.

cooperative agreement outlining acquisition, construction, equipment purchasing and management, daily-operation procedures and maintenance and use of Akron's Community Learning Centers. It is available for review on-line at [http://ci.akron.oh.us/Temporary\\_Pages/Akron-Coop-v18.pdf](http://ci.akron.oh.us/Temporary_Pages/Akron-Coop-v18.pdf).

Akron residents, who overwhelmingly passed Issue 10 in May 2004, enabled the city to generate matching funds needed to secure \$409 million dollars from the Ohio State Facilities Commission. ■

### THE LANGUAGE OF THE CLCS

*If you plan to attend community planning meetings to plan for the CLCs, architects and the construction industry use their own language. To help interpret what you hear and read here are a few common ones:*

**AAG (Akron Architectural Group):** A group of six architectural firms hired to design the facilities—Braun & Steidl Architects, GPD Group, Hasenstab Architects, Inc., Moody/Nolan Ltd., Inc., TC Architects, Inc. and URS.

**CM (Construction Manager):** A group or four local construction companies—G. Stephens, Inc., Kenmore Companies, Panzica and Ruhlin—selected to manage all aspects of building construction.

**OSFC (Ohio School Facilities Commission):** Established by the Ohio General Assembly in 1997 to provide funding,

management, oversight and technical assistance in construction and renovation of school facilities.

**LFI (Locally Funded Initiative):** Includes costs for items not covered by OSFC funding, such as land acquisition, extra classroom space, fixed gym seating and aquatics.

**POR (Program of Requirements):** Evaluation and approval of the educational, community, schedule and budget requirements prior to the design.

**SWING SPACE:** Space used temporarily to house students while new facilities are being built or renovated.

*To learn more about this unprecedented partnership among the city of Akron, the Akron Public Schools and the Ohio School Facilities Commission, visit [www.imagineakronschools.com](http://www.imagineakronschools.com).*



# Lock 3 Live!

Summer, 2004

## June

Gospel Fest  
Saturday, June 12

Greased Lightning  
Saturday, June 19

Ragin' Cajun Fest  
Saturday, June 26

## July

Akron Family Barbeque  
July 3 - 4 - 5

Not-Your-Father's Folk  
Festival  
Saturday, July 10

Polka Party  
Saturday, July 17

Surf's Up Beach Party  
Saturday, July 24

## August

Smooth Jazz Holiday  
Saturday, August 7

Easy Rider  
35th Anniversary of  
Woodstock  
Saturday, August 14

Luck O' The Irish  
Saturday, August 21

Lollipoploozza  
Children's Festival  
Saturday, August 28



## September

Canal Days Celebration  
Saturday, September 4

Celebrate America  
Saturday, September 11

Swing Time  
Saturday, September 18

The British Are Coming  
40th Anniversary of the British Invasion  
Saturday, September 25

.....

WKSU's Homegrown  
Saturday Mornin'  
Saturday, June 12-September 25  
(Except July 3)  
9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.  
(New Extended Hours)





# From Problems to Progress

The “Gloom of ‘74” Long Past, Akron Celebrates Its Reinvention

By **Dave Lieberth**

It was the year when Route 8 stopped at Cuyahoga Falls and Interstate 77 stopped at Ridgewood Road — ending points that seemed more than just geographic. In some people’s minds, it was a time when institutions and situations appeared to have stopped cold.

The year was 1974 — 30 years and a generation ago — and Akron was a city of 278,000, a substantial percentage of whom worked at the Big 4 — Goodyear, Goodrich, Firestone, and General.

In a New Year’s Day 1975 commentary, the *Beacon Journal* described 1974 as “gloomy.” President Nixon left office in disgrace that August. Inflation was out of control as prices changed weekly, and Akron City Council considered legislation to prevent grocers from raising the price of an item once it was put on the shelf. Recession threatened, and Akron’s rubber companies laid off workers as a labor strike loomed.

1974 was the year that John Glenn went to the senate, that Jim Rhodes went back to the statehouse, and that Mayor John Ballard acknowledged in his state of the city address that Akron and the nation were suffering from an “energy crisis.”

But if there was any year since the end of World War II that marked the most dramatic year of change leading to the Akron of today, it was 1974. A new Federal Building opened downtown. Ground was broken for the 19-story Ohio Edison building. President Ford signed the bill creating a national park in the Cuyahoga Valley. Voters approved a county charter commission. And the Akron Chamber of Commerce merged with the Area Progress Board to combine forces to seek new industries.

Akron changed in other ways that year: the Astor theater — downtown’s last until The Civic’s re-birth — closed its burlesque



In 1974, the City saw completion of the Federal Building and the beginning of Ohio Edison’s Headquarters at Akron Centre.

shows. The Soap Box Derby got back on track after a cheater nearly ruined the event forever.

1974 also saw significant social changes. Akron’s public schools and the city’s safety forces were both mired in lawsuits as the city’s all-white fire department, its police department and the schools were targeted for their racial composition.

With “30-30” hindsight — the benefit of three decades of history — a look-back also suggests that other events were most critical to the prosperity that Akron and its downtown enjoy today.

On a single night in 1974, 1,300 residents came out of their homes to attend ten simultaneous meetings sponsored by Goals

for Greater Akron. The citizens were asked to reflect on a plan for the future assembled by 50 community leaders at a three-day retreat in May. The resulting document — setting the course for Akron’s next 25 years — was published in December 1974.

How has Akron done in achieving the 1974 goals? Read the 1974 goals report yourself at our website — [www.ci.akron.oh.us/2025/GGAA-1974.html](http://www.ci.akron.oh.us/2025/GGAA-1974.html). A quick analysis shows that Akron, a city of 217,000 today, has benefited from the 30-year forecast. Taking a walk on the towpath trail is now routine. The Akron-Canton Airport is the fastest-growing airport in the United States. Of rubber’s Big 4, Akron remains home only to Goodyear’s headquarters—but all of the major companies’ research operations are in Akron. And more have joined them, lured by the University’s excellent polymer programs. Summit County remains the only charter county in Ohio.

Perhaps the most interesting view from 30 years forward is the goal adopted for education in 1974:

*Since schools are a major community resource, they should be fully used for recreation, learning and cultural activities all year round.*

Sound familiar? The 30-year dream of residents is just now being realized with passage of last year’s plan to re-build Akron schools as community learning centers. (See article on page 10.)

Goals for Greater Akron was succeeded by the *Imagine.Akron:2025* vision completed in 2000. In his State of the City message this year, Mayor Plusquellic promised to re-engage the community in implementing the bold plans outlined in the year 2000 report.

Interested in helping? Leave a message at our mailbox, [editor@ci.akron.oh.us](mailto:editor@ci.akron.oh.us) or write me at Room 200, 166 S. High Street, Akron, OH 44308. ■



# One last look before the walls came down

By Russ Musarra/Illustration by Chuck Ayers

Standing in the quiet corner of the Akron Art Museum's sculpture garden creates a feeling of déjà vu. As part of our decade-long assignment of capturing the sights of the city, we were there for a final look at the ivy-covered walls—walls that needed to make way for the new 50,000-square-foot museum that will dominate the High Street-Broadway-Market Street site.

Capturing vanishing city scenes has sometimes happened by design. Often it has happened by accident.

The sculpture-garden scene reminded us of our July 1989 feature about walking along Summit Street near West Market Street: Artist Chuck Ayers had focused on a quaint old vine-covered house with a garage made of reddish tiles. The downtown buildings—the First Merit Tower most prominent among them—had loomed in the background. Almost immediately after that story was published, the house and the garage were demolished to make way for a parking lot.

The day we visited the museum, Akron's downtown skyline dominated the view at the southwest corner of the sculpture garden. Yet the garden's ivy-covered walls could still command attention.

Treasures of the city, the museum and this garden had hosted novel displays of natural and inspired beauty, as was the case



with the Akron Garden Club flower show in July 2001. More than 30 flower arrangements on the museum's first floor were the backdrop for gardening experts who interpreted works from the museum's collection, including Childe Hassam's Bedford Hills.

Soon, though, the museum would close

**"If our series of walks around the Akron area have had any kind of theme, it would be the tendency to capture city scenes before they disappear. Sometimes we did so by design. Often it happened by accident."**

to allow the two-year, \$30 million construction project to begin.

We realized before we arrived that this view of downtown would be gone forever once the new museum, designed by the Viennese architects Coop Himmelblau, is completed. Standing there, looking at the cityscape on the other side of the walls, we were glad to be able to share it one more time.

Artist Chuck Ayers and writer Russ Musarra began their series of essays, based on walks around the community, in March 1987 in the Akron Beacon Journal's Sunday magazine. Ayers, a former Beacon Journal artist and

editorial cartoonist, created the comic strip "Crankshaft" with Tom Batiuk. Musarra has combined his interests in history and writing into a career spanning 48 years, including reporting duties at both the Beacon Journal and the now-defunct Cleveland Press. ■



## Business

### City enables **Welcome 3-1-1** Information System

By Mark Williamson

Soon, you'll be able to put away your phone book, AND the magnifying glass you may have to use to read it. Before summertime in Akron, you won't need either of them to connect with city government offices to request service or information.

When the city of Akron launches its new central intake call system for all city service requests, residents can access the City's new Customer Service Request (CSR) system by just pressing 3-1-1 on a touch-tone phone.

The new system will be for service requests only. Emergency services such as police, fire, and EMS will still be available at 9-1-1.

Beginning in late April or early May, city residents will be just three numbers away to access all services—from repairing a pothole, to reporting a water main break or a streetlight outage, from anywhere in the city.

"This is a system based on three principles," said Morgan Wayman, manager of the CSR system. "Rapid deployment of resources, timely intelligence and relentless follow up. Our goal is to provide citizens with timely and specific services and information."

The 3-1-1 call center utilizes new computer software to not only deliver but also measure the performance levels of each department that provides service to the city's customers. Residents who have ever tracked a UPS package or a Federal Express delivery by telephone or on their computer are familiar with the system—when a citizen calls 3-1-1, a tracking number will be assigned to the task that will allow the resident to follow their request as it enters the system, as city workers attend to the request, all the way through completion.

The center will be staffed by a cadre of trained customer service representatives around the clock. Each individual request will be matched with a script at the city's end, with a basic set of questions that the customer service agent will use to get accurate information and ensure uniform service. The requests will then be routed directly to the department in the city best able to follow-up on the request.

Before acquiring the new system, representatives of City Council and the administration visited successful operations in Baltimore and Chicago. ■

# Entrepreneurs Really Show Just How Mobility Works

By Robert Sberna

For people who use wheelchairs, the ability to drive—whether to the grocery store or across the country—can be a liberating experience. In recent years, an Akron company has emerged as a leading provider of specialized vehicles that give individuals with disabilities the mobility that the non-disabled take for granted.

Headquartered in Kenmore, MobilityWorks markets a wide range of products for mobility-restricted people, including wheelchair-accessible vans, scooters and vehicle hand controls.

The firm sells its products to businesses that provide specialized transportation services as well as through its retail stores in Akron, Canton, Toledo, Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh and Albany, N.Y.

Taylor Clark, a MobilityWorks' principal, says the company's products can help wheelchair-bound people to live independently, rather than depending on others to get around. "Our objective is to provide our customers with freedom and choices in their lives," Clark explains.

Bill Koeblitz, president of MobilityWorks, founded the company in 1997. Back then, Koeblitz purchased an Akron specialty-vehicle firm that had a dozen employees and annual sales of \$2 million. Today, MobilityWorks employs 110 and had revenues of about \$30 million last year. In 2002 the firm moved into a 32,000-square-foot manufacturing facility that is used primarily to produce wheelchair-adaptive vehicles.

Clark says he expects the healthcare needs of aging baby boomers to fuel the continuing growth of MobilityWorks into a major force in the specialty-transportation



Client advisor Don Johnson (left) demonstrates van for Taylor Clark (center) and Bill Koeblitz, president.

While MobilityWorks is dedicated to serving the needs of the wheelchair community, the firm also has a strong commitment to its employees and the Akron area.

industry. Expansion plans call for opening at least three new retail locations in the next 18 months or so.

"We hope to grow our manufacturing by 30 percent in the next year," he says, adding, "As we grow, we'll prob-

ably increase our manufacturing employee base over the next 12 months."

While Clark says MobilityWorks is dedicated to serving the needs of the wheelchair community, he adds that the firm also has a strong commitment to its employees and the Akron area.

"Akron has the best employee base in the world," he says. "We've promised our employees that we would stay in Akron. Loyalty to our employees is a big part of our core values." ■





# The Town Crier

by Russ Musarra

## HIGHLAND SQUARE NEW AND OLD

Highland Public Relations honcho BOB ZAJAC is pleased as punch with his new 4,500-square-foot yellow brick corporate digs at 935 West Market. Built in 1913 as a home for C.P. MCCREADY on land that was originally part of the Stan Hywet estate, the deed transferring ownership to McCready is signed by F.A. SEIBERLING, Zajac reports.

"The walls and floor are not wood but masonry and concrete," Zajac says in a note.

Previous owners included DR. E.J. BRAUN, who remodeled the house in 1966 for his residence and dental practice, and a law firm from which Zajac bought the property last October.

Highland PR is restoring the building, "much being paid for by a \$25,000 facade grant from the city of Akron," Zajac said, with the purchase aided by an Akron Initiative loan of \$60,000 and an SBA 504 loan through Cascade Capital Corp.

We'll be able to see vintage images of Highland Square on display throughout the month of May at Angel Falls, the coffee shop owned by JIM KING and RAFAEL OLETTA at 972 West Market St.

Local collectors including retired art teacher EULA KING, mother of Angel Falls' co-owner, hope that the pictorial history will become a vehicle to elicit more Highland Square memories.

## EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

Finance Department accounting technician JACKIE RAMSEY, December's honoree, is the lead employee in the processing of payroll, an assignment she has fulfilled for



16 of nearly 36 years city of Akron service. She has chalked up 19 "very good" service ratings over the last 22 reports. Ramsey's hobbies include shopping, shopping,

and more shopping, with time out for reading and preparing for holidays.

January honoree KIM M. RYAN, an audit and budget account analyst, marks her 10th anniversary June 20. She began her career as a clerical intern for the Planning Department, where she worked until transferring. Her duties include helping prepare the budget book that is presented to the City Council and



working on sections of the comprehensive annual financial report. She earned a degree in business administration and finance from the University of Akron. Her interests include golf, the Akron Turner Club, a pet rabbit named Cosmo and a chocolate Labrador puppy named Rooney.

Patrol Division officer ANDRE MOORE, February's honoree, joined the department in August 1995. As a member of Platoon No. 5, the noon to 8 p.m. shift, since April 2001, he has received numerous commendations from supervisors, fellow officers and citizens and won the platoon prestigious "Coat of Arms" award.



Moore regularly generates high totals in felony and misdemeanor arrests, citations, reports taken and calls for service answered, and was a nominated for the Russ Long "Officer of the

## MORE EMPLOYEE KUDOS

The City of Akron's 2,721 employees demonstrated their generosity in a big way

last year, contributing more than \$25,000 to various agencies in the Akron area. And, a source at City Hall tells the Town Crier, that 282 Akron families were helped through the city of Akron's Holiday Basket Program at the close of last year.

Nurses in Akron's Health Department couldn't be more pleased with the work of NICKIE DORNACK who donates her time to make fleece blankets and scarves that are distributed by Akron nurses as they make rounds to homes of seniors and others who get the caring touch from the city nursing staff directed by CHRISTINE JOHNSON, who sends her appreciation along to Nickie and all the people who are dedicated to serving others.

## DESIGNED FOR SPECTATORS

The new route of the 2004 edition of the Road Runner Akron Marathon & Team Relays to be held October 2 is made to order for everyone—including those who want to watch the action from start to finish, while enjoying other downtown amenities.

Executive race director JIM BARNETT says downtown spectators will be able to watch the runners at four separate points in the race — the starting line on Broadway near the National Inventors Hall of Fame, as they run south through downtown at about the three mile mark, as they run into downtown from the University of Akron at the 10 mile mark and as they finish on South Main Street at Canal Park Stadium.

The 26.2-mile long course was changed in consideration of runners and spectators, said Barnett, who called the Lockheed Martin Airdock a great backdrop for the start of the first race last year, but one spectators were unable to gain access to because of security associated with the company's defense contract work. Many runners didn't like being bussed to the starting line.

You can read more about the event or register to participate by visiting the Road Runner Akron Marathon website at: [www.akronmarathon.org](http://www.akronmarathon.org), or by calling 1-877-375-2RUN. ■





# Akron City

## Here Are Your Seeds! Get Growing!

You're now good to grow—along with the rest of Akron.

The enclosed packet of Keep Akron Beautiful Seeds are yours courtesy of Akron CITY Magazine and the not-for-profit corporation Keep Akron Beautiful. Use your green thumb and the instructions on the packet to make your own contribution to the beauty of our city. You'll be amazed at how easy it is!

We're confident that Akron will be awash in vibrant zinnia-colors before long. And we want to share your gardening skills with others in the city through photos that will appear in the the 2005 Akron Calendar.

Once your Keep Akron Beautiful Seeds are in full bloom, let us know. Call Keep Akron Beautiful at 330-375-2116. Or e-mail [KeepAkronBeautiful@ci.akron.oh.us](mailto:KeepAkronBeautiful@ci.akron.oh.us) or the editor at [editor@ci.akron.oh.us](mailto:editor@ci.akron.oh.us)



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